



**From the Office of  
Angie Gorn, NSHC President/CEO**

## Increase and Sustain Funding for Domestic Violence Prevention and Sexual Assault for Tribal Health Organizations Serving Tribal communities

Too many lives are affected by Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault in the Bering Strait Region.

A recent study was conducted in the Bering Strait Region, the first of its' kind, that gathered information from women about domestic and sexual violence. Authored by the University of Alaska Anchorage Justice Center and the State of Alaska Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, the results were released in February, 2015. One in two women in the Bering Strait Region disclosed that they had been a victim of domestic or sexual violence in their lifetime (51%) and 1 in 10 had experienced it this year.

<http://justice.uaa.alaska.edu/avs/Alaska.html>

Unfortunately, alcohol and other substance abuse is an underlying factor which contributes to the high rate of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault in the Bering Strait Region of Alaska:

- 96% of the calls responded to by the Alaska State Troopers for misdemeanor assaults, domestic violence, and felony assaults, were alcohol related.
- 98% of the support and shelter services provided by the Women's Shelter in Nome care for individuals and families affected by domestic violence and assault that is alcohol-related.

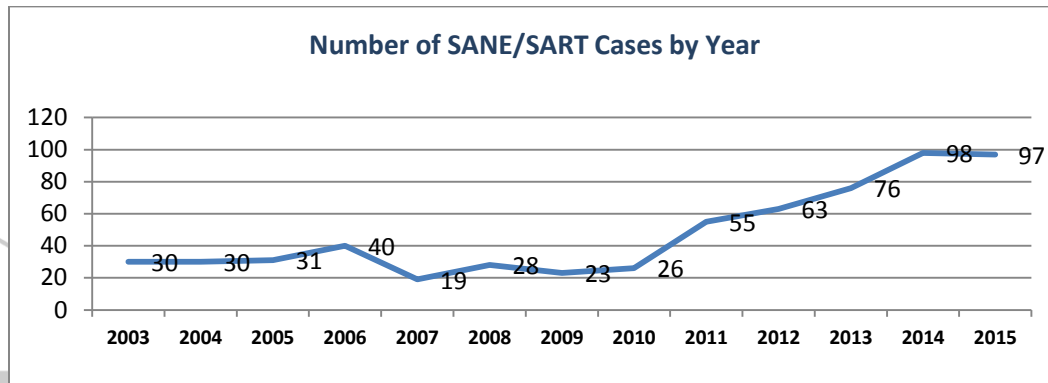
Over the past decade, NSHC and its Board of Directors demonstrated a concern about the rate of violence against Native Women and have kept track of the number of patients coming to the hospital for help after sexual assault or child sexual abuse since 2003. These statistics show that few patients were requesting care after sexual assault or child sexual abuse (an average of 28/year), while anecdotally, medical providers and Board members knew that sexual violence was present in alarming rates in the communities. There was general mistrust of law enforcement and the medical-forensic exams (which can be traumatic themselves if done by an untrained medical provider) were only rarely performed by a Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner.

However, in 2010, NSHC received a DVPI Grant from IHS that funded training and staffing for a SANE/SART Program. This funding was invaluable and provided the opportunity for Norton

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Sound Health Corporation to build a system that works, which encourages women to report because they have the confidence that follow through will take place and justice will be served. The grant funding provided in 2010-2014 through the Indian Health Services, facilitated the development of a Sexual Assault Response Team and full-time personnel dedicated to the program. This funding encouraged a high-level of community outreach and the number of sexual assaults reported by women in the Bering Strait Region doubled after the first grant year with an overall increase of 276% at the end of the five year grant award.



NSHC was recently awarded another two-year grant from Indian Health Services for a total of \$185,000/year to continue to with SART Program activities. However, this funding is limited to one year. Long-term funding awards are greatly appreciated and enable Tribal Health Organizations to sustain their program longer.

The funding makes an impact and the statistics demonstrate the need.

**Recommendation:** Continue to make Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Prevention a priority for Tribal Communities; Increase the level of funding and sustain funding for the long-term (five year awards).